MEDICAID IMPLEMENTS POLICY CHANGES TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND DECREASE COSTS

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DENVER – September 10, 2009 – The Department of Health Care Policy and Financing announced today that Medicaid has increased how often smoking cessation medications may be prescribed to help clients quit smoking. This common sense policy change results in improved health for clients and decreased Medicaid costs by decreasing hospitalizations and provider visits.

The expanded benefit gives providers the option to prescribe up to two, 90-day drug therapy treatments each year to aid in smoking cessation. This is an increase from a 90-day drug therapy per lifetime. Studies show that it takes an average of seven attempts to quit smoking and the health and economic benefits outweigh the cost of medications. In order to receive the benefit, a client must get a prescription from their physician that indicates the client's intent to enroll in counseling.

Tobacco use is the single leading cause of preventable illness and death in the United States. Each year, more than 430,000 Americans – including 4,700 Coloradans – die prematurely from smoking-related diseases. Today, 17.6 percent of adults in Colorado use tobacco.

"There are over 470,000 clients receiving benefits through Medicaid and 34 percent of the adults in the Medicaid program use tobacco," states Dr. Sandeep Wadhwa, state Medicaid director. "The last time the nation smoked at this rate was in 1977. Clients enrolled in Medicaid use tobacco almost twice the rate of other Coloradans. By providing additional tools for clients to achieve their smoking cessation goals, the probability of success increases significantly. Colorado Medicaid's goal is to improve the health and functioning of our clients in a cost-effective manner. Increasing the pharmacological options for providers to help clients quit smoking supports this goal."

The benefits of smoking cessation increase as time passes.

At 5 years:

 From 5 to 15 years after quitting, stroke risk is reduced to that of people who have never smoked

At 10 years:

- Risk of lung cancer drops to as little as one-half that of continuing smokers
- Risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney, and pancreas decreases
- Risk of ulcer decreases

At 15 years:

- Risk of coronary heart disease is now similar to that of people who have never smoked
- Risk of death returns to nearly the level of people who have never smoked

The Department and the Governor's Office thank the Tobacco Cessation Sustainability Partnership, TCSP, for all of their invaluable help in developing this new policy. The TCSP includes representatives of the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Chaffee County Public Health, Colorado Association of Health Plans, Business Health Forum, Colorado Clinical Guidelines Collaborative, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Medical Society, Colorado Tobacco Education and Prevention Alliance, National Association of Hispanic Nurses, Colorado, National Jewish Health and the University of Colorado Denver Center for Behavioral Health and Wellness.

About the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing: The Department administers the Medicaid and Child Health Plan *Plus* programs as well as a variety of other programs for Colorado's low-income, elderly and people with disabilities. The mission of the Department is to improve access to cost-effective, quality health care services for Coloradans. For more information about the Department, please visit Colorado.gov/hcpf.

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